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THE GREAT CONJUNCTION!



Just in time for Christmas, Jupiter and Saturn will come closer than they have since the Middle Ages. The event, known as the "Great Conjunction", will take place on the longest night of the year, offering stargazers a unique opportunity to view it.

How often have you raised your eyes to the heavens in prayer or to seek the wisdom of patience, especially during this novel year? Well, a long-awaited celestial event is coming this Christmas season, so get ready to look up and see it. The appearance of the "Christmas Star" in 2020 will be your only chance during the entire century!

As Christians, we may have heard a great deal about the star of David that appeared during the birth of Jesus. Now, a certain astronomical phenomenon involving stars will occur in late December of 2020 when the planets Saturn and Jupiter align and form a "Christmas star" shape in their alignment.

The two largest planets in the solar system are coming closer together than they have been since the Middle Ages, and it's happening just in time for Christmas.

On the night of December 21, the winter solstice, Jupiter and Saturn will appear so closely aligned in our sky that they will look like a double planet. This close approach is called a conjunction, and can still be viewed during Christmas week.

"Alignments between these two planets are rather rare, occurring once every 20 years or so, but this conjunction is exceptionally rare because of how close the planets will appear to one another," said Rice University astronomer Patrick Hartigan in a statement.

But between December 16 and 25, they will become even cozier. Look for the Jupiter-Saturn conjunction low in the western sky for about an hour after sunset each evening during this time.

"You'd have to go all the way back to just before dawn on March 4, 1226, to see a closer alignment between these objects visible in the night sky. If you're a stargazer, you've likely noticed Jupiter and Saturn have been getting closer together since the summer. And they're currently visible in our night sky, inching ever closer to one another. And get ready, there's a meteor shower expected during Christmas week as well. Be especially good and perhaps Santa will bring you that telescope you asked for back in your youth!

I have been watching the slow approach of the planets toward one another just after sunset for the past few clear evenings. You can view it with the naked eye, but I like the iPhone app called SkyView Lite. It's free, and lets you really identify not only planets but entire constellations. Cooper Lake State Park is a good place to experience the heavenly expanse, but places in town can work just as well for you, like Coleman Park. Find an expanse of sky that's not blocked by trees, and look to the southwest in the region of the moon just after dusk. Let your vision gradually acclimate to the darkness, and you'll be surprised at what you will see! Just imagine, stargazing was once as much a pastime for early civilizations as TV watching is for us today. Why not take some time to 'lift thine eyes to the heavens and behold His glory' especially during Christmas week.

Til 2021 arrives, let's count our blessings and do unto others as we'd have them do to us. Let's look for the good in the world, it is out there. Let's allow ourselves to believe in something that may seem miraculous. I appreciate each of you for your readership and will anticipate many more weekly visits with you at the Corral Gate!

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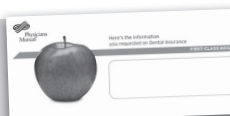
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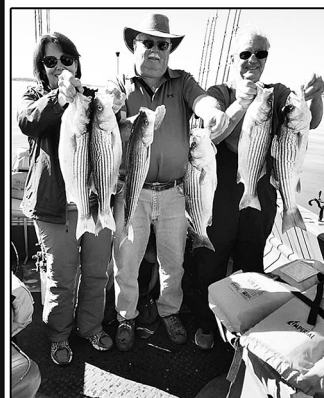
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Thomas "Tom" Michael Stewart January 28, 1933 ~ December 11, 2020 (age 87)

Thomas Michael Stewart, a former reporter and government spokesman, passed away on December 11, 2020 in Sulphur Springs, Texas, where he had made his home since his retirement 24 years ago. He was 87.

A memorial service will be held in the spring to allow his many out-of-state family and friends to attend.

Tom began his reporting career in 1956 as a Hartford Courant "obit man." After two years of writing up the details of people's lives, he joined the New Haven, Connecticut bureau of the Associated Press. His principal beat for the AP was the Connecticut Legislature. When the AP closed its New Haven bureau in the mid-1960s, Tom transferred to its Washington D.C. bureau. He covered the Treasury Department as well as major events in the city, such as the riots following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King.

Tom changed jobs once again in 1969 when he joined the British wire service Reuters. For the next ten years, he had two beats: the United States Department of Justice and the United States Supreme Court. In that era, the Court sent decisions stuffed into pneumatic tubes down to the reporters in the basement pressroom as the justices read the decisions in the majestic courtroom upstairs. The wire service reporters scrambled to put the pages in order, digest the decisions as quickly as possible, and file the story. Tom covered the

Justice Department throughout the Watergate scandal, and as the dean of the pressroom, he was the leadoff questioner at the press conference after the Saturday Night Massacre.

While Tom was working as a reporter in Washington, he became very active in the National Press Club. By the end of his reporting career, he was the Chair of the Board of Governors of the National Press Building Association. He also was very involved in the Newspaper Guild, serving as a shop steward when he was at Reuters.

At the end of the 1970s, Tom switched sides. He became a spokesman for one of the very government departments he had covered – the Department of Justice. He took reporter calls around the clock, and he drafted and edited the department's press releases.

Tom was born in Chicago on January 28, 1933. He grew up playing in the alley behind the family's three-flat in the South Shore neighborhood. When his father, an attorney for the Immigration and Naturalization Service, was transferred to Cleveland to help naturalize new citizens at the end of World War II, Tom moved to Lakewood, Ohio. He finished high school in Kansas City, Missouri.

He received a journalism degree from the University of Kansas, where he became a lifelong Jayhawk basketball fan. He graduated in 1954, and immediately married fellow KU graduate Anne Hyde. Almost immediately after that, he was drafted into the United States Army. Tom's first wife Anne passed away in 1991. Tom remarried in 1996. His new wife, Carolyn Keys, resided in Sulphur Springs, Texas, so Tom retired from government service and moved there in 1996.

Tom was a man of strong liberal principles, formed in a family that fed hot meals from their kitchen door to the men riding the railroads during the Depression, and forged during a career reporting on the events of two tumultuous decades. Tom also had an irreverent sense of humor. He entertained his children and grandchildren with funny tales from his own childhood. He was a hit with kids, even teenage girls in his daughters' girl scout troops, whom he led on spelunking, white water rafting and backpacking trips. In his later years, he and friends in Sulphur Springs created Camp RonnaDonnaJerry-Tombo for kids to enjoy Lake Elberta in Sulphur Springs. He also was a serious hiker and backpacker who performed trail maintenance crews with the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club.

Tom is survived by his wife, Carolyn, his three daughters from his first marriage: Elizabeth Jane Stewart (Joseph Pignatello) of Hamden, Connecticut; Alice Freeman Stewart (Kevin Swanson) of Thetford Center, Vermont; and Kathleen Anne Stewart (Barry Wood) of Centreville, Virginia; two grandchildren: Clare Swanson and Connor Pignatello, his stepdaughter Betsy Levenson (Kenny) of Houston, Texas, his stepson Scott Keys (Amy) of Sulphur Springs, six stepgrandchildren: Kelly Keys, Blake Irving, Grant Levenson, Bailee Keys, Katie Levenson and Hunter Coleman; and one great-grandson, Trenton Irving. He also is survived by his brother Robert Bruce Stewart of Cincinnati, Ohio and numerous nieces and nephews.

The family wishes to thank all of the nurses and therapists who helped Tom during the last few months of his life. In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club or the Sulphur Springs Symphony League.

Louise (Clemmons) McDaniel December 4, 1932 ~ December 18, 2020 (age 88)

Our beloved Mildred "Louise" McDaniel, 88, of Campbell, Texas departed this world peacefully surrounded by her family on December 18, 2020.

She was born in Ridgeway, Texas on December 4, 1932, to Elmer Clay Clemmons and Lottie Marie Fleenor Clemmons.

Louise, aka "Ma" to those who knew and loved her well, leaves behind her husband, Virgil A. McDaniel, who stood steadfastly by her side for 73 years and five months. Louise, wearing her favorite color pink, was just 15 and Virgil 18 when they married in Rockwall, Texas, on July 18, 1948.

Famous homemaker Martha Stewart has nothing on Louise, who had a passion for keeping a spotless home, cooking, gardening, and creating beautiful floral arrangements. Unlike Martha, however, Louise also fished, rode four-wheelers and dirt bikes, and took motorcycle treks through Oklahoma and Texas. And anyone who knew her knew she was good at it all. She was a good friend and great buddy to Virgil. When Covid-19 prevented him from being able to visit Ma in the nursing home, he would not be kept away. He visited her outside her window every day, taking her pup Katie along each time. Ma and Virgil went on a good number of adventures together, many of them spur-of-the-moment trips to Red River, New Mexico. Their greatest adventure, however, was raising their two children, Steve and Karen. Welcoming her home to the next life was her son, Steve, whom she patiently waited 45 years to see again. Also eagerly awaiting her arrival were her parents, Elmer and Lottie, nephew David. She is survived by her daughter, Karen Perkins and husband Mike; granddaughter Ashley Roberts Davies and husband Jacob; granddaughter Taylor Perkins Stewart and husband Joseph; great-granddaughter Rylie Stewart; sister Rosemary "Rosie" Morris and husband Don; and her sweet little dog, Katie.

Services were Tuesday, December 22, at Commerce Funeral Home. Visitation was the same day beginning at 1 p.m., followed by the service at 2 p.m. Pallbearers were Mike Perkins, Joseph Stewart, Jacob Davies, and Pat Zapata. She was interred at Brigham Cemetery in Campbell.

The family would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to the wonderful staff at Oak Manor Nursing Home in Commerce, Texas for taking such wonderful, loving care of our Ma. Thank you for being there and loving her when we couldn't.

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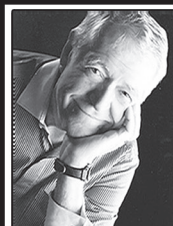
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Tumbleweed Smith

A BULLET DIDN'T STOP THE AMAZING JOE MURPHY

Tumbleweed Smith

Joe Murphy has made a living as a singer and entertainer most of his adult life. He was born in Tulsa and after a long stay in a hospital was adopted by James and Joy Murphy of Rule, Texas. He became quite popular as a youngster and at age four, residents of Rule threw him a going away party when the family moved to Carthage.

When he was a senior in Carthage high school, Joe was a big man on campus: 6 feet 5, 190 pounds, varsity baseball pitcher and an exemplary student. In April of 1978 he went home for lunch and to change clothes for a game that afternoon. He stopped at a drive-in to visit with some friends. A 16-year old sophomore student was there playing around with a pistol. He pulled the trigger a few times.

"I told him to put that thing away, that this was no place to be pulling the trigger on a pistol," says Joe. "He said 'don't worry, Joe. It's not loaded.' About that time the gun went off. The bullet hit me in the throat and instantly paralyzed me from the chest down."

Although he can't walk, he can use his arms and hands. After the shooting, Joe was in rehab 3 months and slowly gained back his voice.

"The bullet had gone through my voice box and I was told I wouldn't be able to talk properly again. I had a tracheotomy and had to hold my hand over a little gizmo on my throat to keep the air from going out so I could talk. It was raspy and finally healed."

Joe, who is 60 now, says his parents and friends helped and encouraged him.

"My parents bought me a guitar for graduation, and I started playing it to exercise my hands. Then I started trying to sing a little bit, then started singing for the public."

Friends encouraged Joe to enter a talent contest that the Louisiana Hayride was conducting. He entered, won and became a regular on the Louisiana Hayride 6 years.

Joe, or Sugar Joe, as some people call him, formed a band and performed all over East Texas. He won "Entertainer of the Year" at several East Texas Oprys. These days he's still performing with his guitar.

"That's my band now, just my guitar. It always shows up for work on time."

Joe has been in a wheel chair 42 years and has spent lots of time in hospitals, but it hasn't kept him from entertaining, hunting, fishing, driving up and down country roads and being thankful.

"You know, one door shut but the Good Lord opened another one."

Joe says the 16 year old who shot him spent a little time in juvenile detention but was never charged with anything. It was called an accident. The boy with the "unloaded gun" moved from Carthage with his family.



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